

# Resolve to be Ready!

## Churches Play a Growing Role in Emergency Management

### Guide to Disaster Ministry in Your Congregation

Churches have a long history of working together to respond to emergency needs. They have helped build, rebuild, and renew communities after disasters. God's people know the saving grace and power of God and God's love for all creation.

Your church—in cooperation with the wider religious community—plays a unique role among disaster agencies because people of faith recognize the sanctity of all human life. While churches have a unique role responding to the spiritual and pastoral needs of survivors, churches are also called to advocate for the equitable allocation of material resources according to need following disasters. After a disaster strikes, people of God:

- Stand on the side of the oppressed to offer advocacy with and for those most in need
- Seek out unmet needs of people who were vulnerable and marginalized before the disaster
- Provide a larger vision of life that includes emotional and spiritual care as well as physical rebuilding
- Assist in long-term recovery of those in need, regardless of the type of disaster which occurred
- Restore and rebuild community relationships

### The Faith Community and Disaster Ministry

The religious community plays a vital and unique role in long-term recovery, coordinating and focusing energy and resources on people with disaster-related unmet needs who often fall through the cracks of government and other social service systems.

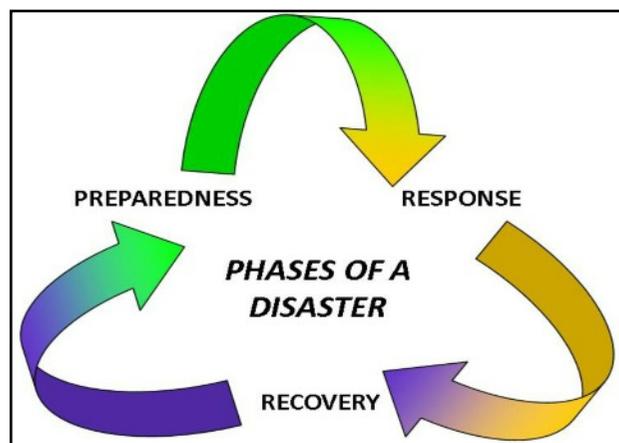
People may not be able to stabilize their living situation for a number of reasons. Although the Federal Individuals and Households Program may provide much needed assistance, some people will not receive enough aid through insurance or other assistance programs for required repairs or rebuilding. When personal resources or insurance are not adequate, recovery is impaired. Disaster survivors also vary considerably in their ability to cope with a major emergency. Most people who led normal, healthy lives before the disaster can recover with temporary assistance. Others may not be able to recover as quickly.



The religious community also has a special role to fulfill as people rebuild their lives emotionally and spiritually after a disaster. People of faith can offer spiritual support to survivors and caregivers in the rescue task following a disaster at staging and evacuation areas. When other responders are providing relief assistance—medical services, food, and temporary shelter—the faith community can offer support to survivors, professional caregivers, and volunteers. At the same time the faith community continues its established traditions of spiritual care and religious observances.

As disaster recovery continues, still other needs will emerge. As some assisting agencies complete their mission and transition to “normal” operations, local faith-based organizations are likely to assume more responsibility and encourage broad participation and ownership among other institutions and people in the community in the ongoing recovery.

The Bible shows Jesus as the compassionate servant, comforter, and advocate and his focus on helping “the least of these” provide a framework for understanding the religious community’s work in disaster—bringing hope and order to the chaos.



### Spiritual Care Guidelines

The following guidelines are from Church World Service, Elkhart, Indiana.

**Offer Security.** Disaster survivors need assurance about their safety, above all. They need to know they are out of harm's way and that you are a person with whom they can safely ventilate their feelings. First, simply say: “You are out of harm's way now.” Reinforce what you say with a welcoming smile, and eye contact.

**Listen.** Listen with an attentive ear. Guide the conversation when survivors don't seem to know what to talk about by asking: “What did you see?” and “How did you feel?” Relax and let them wander verbally.

**Be Quiet.** Allow survivors to take the lead in conversations. Do not interrupt. Ask questions only when they seem to want to talk. Their feelings are so intense they may not know where to begin. (Do not tell them you know how they feel. You do not.)

**Support.** You may hear things that shock you. Survivors may have feelings that cause them to say things that are violent in nature. They may curse or describe a desire to hurt someone. Do not confront or correct at this time. Let survivors know you are on their side.

**Stay Theologically Neutral.** Survivors may try to explain things in ways that contradict your theology. Although you may be used to discussing theology with people and attempting to teach them your doctrine, do not preach at this time. Rather, let survivors preach to you. Avoid trying to answer questions like “How could God let something like this happen?” Attempts to explain God's will could anger or confuse them rather than help.

**Pray.** Depending on the situation, this may be only a silent prayer which you offer internally as you sit with the affected persons, as you leave them, or even sometime later in the day. Prayer should never be forced. When the survivor is calm, you may say something like, “I'll keep you in my prayers.” If they respond positively in some way, such as thanking you, ask if they would like you to pray with them now.

Article Source: Church World Service, Elkhart, IN